

## Give me a Break! Crisis Theories and Contemporary Narratives of World-building in Sociology

Rodrigo Cordero Vega  
Department of Sociology  
University of Warwick, UK

### Abstract

A strong sense of distress and crisis is back again in the front page of social sciences agenda (e.g. terrorism, climate change and ecological catastrophes, global capitalist financial crises, etc.). Paradoxically, social sciences have lost any confidence in the need and possibilities of crisis theories. Particularly in sociology, a discipline in which this notion has played an important role in the articulation of its historical vision and identity, the current sense is that crisis is part of the intellectual history of sociology but not an important theoretical concept any longer. This is particularly true since the progressive rise of right wing modernism and neoliberal globalization during the 1980s and the “post-ideological consensus” after 1989, when the analytical possibilities of crisis theory were blocked and crisis became an exhausted concept.

My purpose in this paper is to reclaim the importance of crisis in social theory and empirical social analysis. The bottom line for this discussion is to understand the place and meaning that crisis has had within sociological theory. I outline the central role that crisis has had in the articulation of the sociological imagination, examining some of the main characteristics of classical theories of crisis in sociology and its current relevance. Secondly, I discuss the decline of crisis theories and specifically what I call the “crisis of crisis theory” in sociology and the emerging importance of some “replacement theories”; I specifically discuss the limits of theories of *global risk society* as a mainstream narrative and research program in sociology. Finally, I advance reflections about why crisis is still an important concept for sociology and the relevance of rethinking its theoretical potential in a connected global society.

*Paper presented at ISA Connected Histories Conference, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2008, University of Warwick.*